

WHO BRINGS THE WATER?

Negotiating state responsibility in water sector reform in Niger

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Abstract

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For over 40 years the water sector in Niger has been subject to constant reform reflecting and accompanying general changes in the construction of the role of the state in provision of public services. This is a process that has closely followed different movements in what can be called global development discourse. Due to the heavy dependence on external funds, contemporary reforms continue to be shaped by development cooperation, to a large extent dominated by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP), and the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness.

This thesis explores how Nigerien state agents articulate state responsibility in the water sector, thus shaping how policy and practice is conceived of. The aim is to better understand the possibility for Nigerien state responsibility in water service provision in a context of heavy dependence on aid.

The main body of the thesis is based on interviews made with 27 Nigerien state agents in the water sector, as well as on participation in state-donor meetings and workshops between 2007 and 2010. It is argued in the thesis that in order to understand effects of power it does not suffice to analyse governing logics but we have to pay closer attention to the agency of being governed. Meaning, in this case, how the state agents engage with processes of subjectivation by which they constitute themselves as responsible subjects. The thesis approaches state agent subjectivities through narrative method, analysing how they narrate themselves and the state temporally in terms of choice and control in ways that shape how responsibility is understood. As such the thesis explores the way in which state agents translate the responsabilising logics of development cooperation as well as how they constitute themselves as ethical subjects in relation to the population. The thesis does this by dealing with; the implementation of the programme approach, the delegation of responsibility to the local level and the introduction of private actors into the sector.

Keywords: Niger, water services, the state in Africa, governmentality, responsabilisation, responsibility, ownership, privatisation, decentralisation, narrative method